



CITY of NORTHAMPTON
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Huge Spike in COVID-19 Cases Prompts the Northampton Board of Health to Ramp Up Testing, Urge Vaccination

NORTHAMPTON - An incredible spike in COVID-19 cases prompts the City of Northampton Health Department to ramp up testing and strongly advises people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and to receive their boosters if they have not done so already.

As the City of Northampton daily COVID case rates exceed last year's peak surge numbers, Northampton Health Director, Merridith O'Leary is urging the public to get fully vaccinated and to get tested frequently if you have been exposed, sick or going to be in large indoor gatherings.

Beginning December 27, 2021, the Northampton Health Department in partnership with Curative will be offering free COVID-19 PCR testing to the public. A drive-through and walk-up testing site will be available to the public in the Roundhouse Plaza Parking Lot, located on Old South Street, behind the City Hall Campus. This site will operate on Mondays from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and Fridays from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 pm. **Testing will not be operating on Friday, December 24, or Friday, December 31, 2021.**

The Northampton testing site will offer PCR testing free of charge, will not require insurance, will not require proof of citizenship, and will not require an appointment or physician referral. Individuals who are getting tested will need to be able to perform their own nasal swab while being observed by a medical professional. Caregivers may perform the nasal swab for those in their care, under the same medical supervision. Appointments are not required. However, pre-registration is helpful. Results at this location are expected to be ready between 24 to 48 hours from the time of testing. There is no age restriction for this testing site.

The City of Easthampton Health Department will also be hosting a drive-through test site; Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at Millside Park, 2 Ferry St., Easthampton. Please check Easthampton's website for more information at <https://easthamptonma.gov/357/COVID-19>.

Additionally, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts granted the City of Northampton 5,000 rapid self-tests intended for distribution to the public; specifically to populations most vulnerable to complications of COVID and/or those who currently have limited access to testing. The rapid self-tests are antigen tests that provide results in 15 minutes. The tests can reveal, with high accuracy, whether a person is infectious at that moment. Public Health Director Merridith O'Leary states, "These rapid tests are a tool you can use to make sure you're not infectious if you're going into a place where you really would not want to pass the virus on — like a big family holiday gathering, or if you work with older vulnerable folks. It is important to note that if you wait for symptoms, it could be too late and you have already transmitted the virus".

Self-testing is an important layer of prevention against the spread of COVID-19. Self-testing empowers individuals to monitor their health and protect those around them. The goal is to fill some gaps in testing access. Access has been particularly challenging for individuals who are vulnerable because of factors such as socioeconomic strain, lack of transportation, lack of stable housing, or disability. These nasal swab tests may be used for anyone two years of age

and older, and caregivers will be able to assist individuals who are unable to swab themselves. Rapid self-tests are also available to purchase at retail pharmacies and insurance may cover the cost.

The Health Department emphasizes that self-tests without medical supervision do not replace tests ordered by or under the supervision of a certified healthcare provider, pharmacy, or lab. A PCR test at a medical facility is still the best-known test. In particular, if someone has any COVID symptoms or a known exposure it is important to have a PCR test. At-home tests are not accepted for the purposes of returning to work or school when symptomatic, for exiting quarantine early, or for claiming exemption from quarantine, testing, or vaccine requirements on the basis of being recently COVID-recovered.

The Northampton Health Department will prioritize the distribution of the rapid tests to vulnerable populations through agencies and facilities such as shelters, low-income housing, food pantries, and community health centers. The remaining tests will be available to the public, with particular emphasis on households that are experiencing significant financial strain or other barriers to accessing testing.

Information about the new Northampton PCR testing site, at-home rapid test pick-up locations, and information on how to pre-register for testing will be available next week at <https://northamptonma.gov/2392/Local-Testing-Sites>.

Information about other local testing sites is available at <https://northamptonma.gov/2392/Local-Testing-Sites>.

Information on the COVID-19 vaccine or to register for a vaccination appointment, please visit <https://www.northamptonma.gov/2219/Vaccine-Clinics>

For more information, contact Public Health Director Merridith O’Leary at moleary@northamptonma.gov or call the Northampton Health Department at 413-587-1215.